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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: PRESS/INFORMATION FREEDOM ISSUES AT THE FORE

1. (SBU) Summary: Authorities from two states in the South of Sudan have moved against press outlets and the representative of a NGO for disseminating information that the authorities judged inimical to their interests. The UN and the EU have engaged on two of these cases, and we stand ready to discuss the ramifications with the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS). End summary.

Policing the Airwaves

2. (SBU) UNMIS has reported that the Security Service of Central Equatoria State (CES) has requested tapes of a program aired on UN radio and ordered UN officials to come to the headquarters of the Security Service. The proximate cause of the row was the "Vox Pop" segment of the show, public sound bites on questions of general interest. The issue of the day in question was whether the day of John Garang's death should become a holiday in the South. Most of those interviewed at random said yes; a few said no, and several said that it should be celebrated as a memorial for all Sudanese who died during the conflict.

3. (SBU) The CES approached UN radio personnel and requested that they surrender a tape of the show to the Security Service. The UN does not know if CES is interested in what the UN asked or who spoke out against the holiday. The UN notes that the latter would be pointless, since none of those interviewed were identified by name, but on principle the UN has said they will not release tapes to security officials. UN Head of Office for South Sudan James Ellery told UN radio that he would deal with the issue. When CES called UN personnel to its offices, Ellery replied that they could come to call upon him at his office, but no UN personnel would go to the Security Service. He has referred the issue to New York as well.

4. (SBU) In an unrelated incident, CES has shut down independent Radio Liberty after they too refused a summons by the Security Services. The CES authorities cited failure by the radio station to obtain proper licenses, but the station manager believes that this was an issue over comments made on the air that the CES did not like. Radio Liberty does not yet know exactly what comment might have been the root cause.

See no Evil, Hear no Evil, Speak no Evil

5. (SBU) A third case, potentially more serious, involves a NGO employee who has been arrested and detained for releasing an Internet article critical of Join Integrated Units' performance while searching for stolen cattle in East Equatoria State (EES). We have seen a copy of the article, which is quite harsh and accuses the Governor of EES State of bias and the JIUs of engaging in human rights abuses, including rape and pillage. We cannot corroborate at this time if the charges are true.

6. (SBU) The Executive Director of the NGO in question, Manna Sudan, is a Sudanese national named Charles Loker. He was arrested in Ikoto on July 4 and transferred to Torit two days later, where he

remains in detention. He has been accused, but not formally charged, with defaming the government and waging war against the state under article of the Sudanese Criminal Act of 1991. Loker has not been granted access to a lawyer, and a UNMIS human rights monitor who sought to visit him was reportedly denied access. The EU, which funds Manna Sudan, has dispatched personnel from Khartoum to meet with the GoSS on the case.

Time to Weigh In

17. (SBU) COMMENT: The GoSS has done a commendable job in allowing a nascent independent media to emerge. We do not think it would be desirable to reverse this trend by allowing state officials to act arbitrarily against the free flow of information - flawed or not - that it does not find to its liking. We are prepared to meet with GoSS Information Minister Kwaje at first opportunity to suggest that the litmus test of information should not be the approval of state officials and that the GoSS should be closely involved with this important function of constructing a more democratic society. END COMMENT.

STEINFELD